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The purpose of the study was to investigate and describe the teaching strategies of five teachers fostering the natural development of literacy in prekindergarten children, prior to and during the teachers' introduction to a meaning-centered model of written language learning. Teachers were interviewed and videotaped. Observations were followed by inservice workshops promoting ways to facilitate natural written language strategies of children. Data revealed each teacher's initial orientation to the teaching/learning of written language. As these teachers were exposed to the meaning-centered theoretical model of written language learning, significant changes occurred in their teaching behaviors. Rather than limiting strategies, the teachers used enabling strategies which resulted in more spontaneous and self-directed writing by children than previously was the case. (Author/RH)

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TEACHING STRATEGIES WHICH ENABLE OR LIMIT PREKINDERGARTEN WRITTEN LANGUAGE LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The purpose of the study was to investigate and describe the teaching strategies of five teachers fostering the natural development of literacy in prekindergarten children, prior to and during the teachers' introduction to a meaning-centered model of written language learning.

Procedures: Teachers were interviewed and videotaped. Observations were followed by inservice workshops promoting ways to facilitate natural written language strategies of children.

Findings: The data revealed each teacher's initial orientation to the teaching/learning of written language. As these teachers were exposed to the meaning-centered theoretical model of written langauge learning, there were significant changes in their teaching behaviors. The teachers used enabling rather than limiting strategies which resulted in the children's more spontaneous and self-directed writing.

TEACHING STRATEGIES WHICH ENABLE OR LIMIT PREKINDERGARTEN WRITTEN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Halliday's (1975, 1978) sociolinguistic view considered language behavior as dependent on the social context in which language occurs in communication between persons. From this social interpretation of language, attention is directed to the individual within the human environment to explain the child's natural linguistic development. Halliday's position suggests a functional view of language in use: attention is focued on what language can do and what the speaker can do with language. The functional-interactional theory of language development, then, is concerned with langauge between people: language is viewed as transactive and is learned through transactions with others.

This sociolinguistic theory has served as a foundation for research in written language learning as we have come to know that children learn to write in ways similar to how they learn to talk (C. Chomsky, 1970; Clay, 1975; Ferreiro, 1978, Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982; Lavine, 1977; Read, 1971, 1973, 1975). Both are natural, primary language learning processes. Just as young children use sounds and body language to communicate meaning and then move into more

adult-like speech, so do they use drawing, scribbles, symbols, random letters, and graphophonemic representations as they move into standard orthography. In both oral and written language systems, children construct personally meaningful rule systems based on their understandings of oral and written language surrounding them in their daily life experiences.

There have been, more recently, research reports on both the home and school influences upon the learning processes for written language in young children (Bissex, 1980; DeFord, 1981; Graves, 1981; Hall, Moretz & Stratom, 1976; Harste & Burke, 1977, 1980; Hoffman, 1982; Hoffman & McCully, 1984; Holdaway, 1979; McCully, 1982; Searcy, 1984; Wanner, 1983; Watson, 1982; Wells, 1980). Collectively, this research has confirmed that this influence of home and school upon young children's written language development is a direct result of what parents and teachers believe the writing process to be and their subsequent expectations for young children's writing. This belief is evidenced in both the informal and formal teaching strategies used by adults in their interactions with children (Hoffman, 1985).

The child's first school teacher is in a critical position for facilitating and nurturing the development of the roots of literacy. A problem exists, however, in that

many prekindergarten teachers are unfamiliar with recent sociolinguistic theory and research. Consequently, they may not recognize nor understand the natural learning-to-write processes of their young students. Without this knowledge, they may work at crosspurposes with the children rather than enabling their literacy learning.

A study, conducted by Schrader (1984), described the teaching strategies used by five teachers in their efforts to foster the development of literacy in prekindergarten children. Videotapings covered a time period prior to and during which the teachers were introduced to a meaning-centered model of written language learning in young children. These tapings permitted study of the observable differences in their teaching strategies as a result of an inservice training program.

It is the authors' purpose to discuss the ways in which the instructional strategies of one of the five teachers enabled or limited her young student's natural development of written language use. Through excerpts from the videotaping typescripts, we will be able to examine the oral language transactions between teacher and child as an example of similar transactions of the other teachers and children.

First Observation: Teacher and Child Draw and Write

For the first taping, the child was asked to draw a picture and write about it, an activity many children do on their own. Furthermore, research has shown that children usually talk and write more about what they themselves have drawn or experienced (Kane, 1982). The child was told that the teacher could help if needed.

Teacher (Lois) with Courtney

Courtney drew several figures and discussed each one as she worked. After some time had been spent on drawing, the teacher attemped to have closure on the drawing activity and to have the child write. Courtney either rejected or ignored the teacher's directions and continued with her picture.

Teacher	Child
Do you want to write your story now? Do you want to write it?	
	Now I need to do one more color. I take the purple and one more and brown and yellow.
Are you ready to write your story?	
	Huh-huh [no]. I'm going to make a little cap. A little hat. A little hat. (Draws.)
OK, I think you are ready to write your story. I think you have a very colorful picture.	

When Courtney seemed ready to write, Lois asked her how she was going to begin her story. The child responded that she was going to start with "window" because she had made it first. With marker in hand and ready to write, Courtney turned to her teacher for assistance: "I can't make it. What does that spell it?" Lois asked her how she would like to spell it and Courtney named letters, "C-U-R-S", that she wanted to represent "window". The child began writing and talking about letter names and letter formation: "Here's a U. I don't care how ... I'm going to make a U like this." (Figure 1).

At this point Lois directed Courtney's attention to sentence composition by reminding her of how the children had dictated an experience story after going on a field trip to the turkey farm. She gave the child a pencil and a blank piece of paper on which Courtney made several marks. When asked by the teacher to read, the child read in a reading voice: "That is a turkey. That is a turkey farm." (Figure 2). Courtney then said she was ready to write the "window part;" Lois gave her a new piece of paper.

Teacher	Child
OK, well let's do it on this piece of paper. Let's do it up here; start at the top of the paper.	

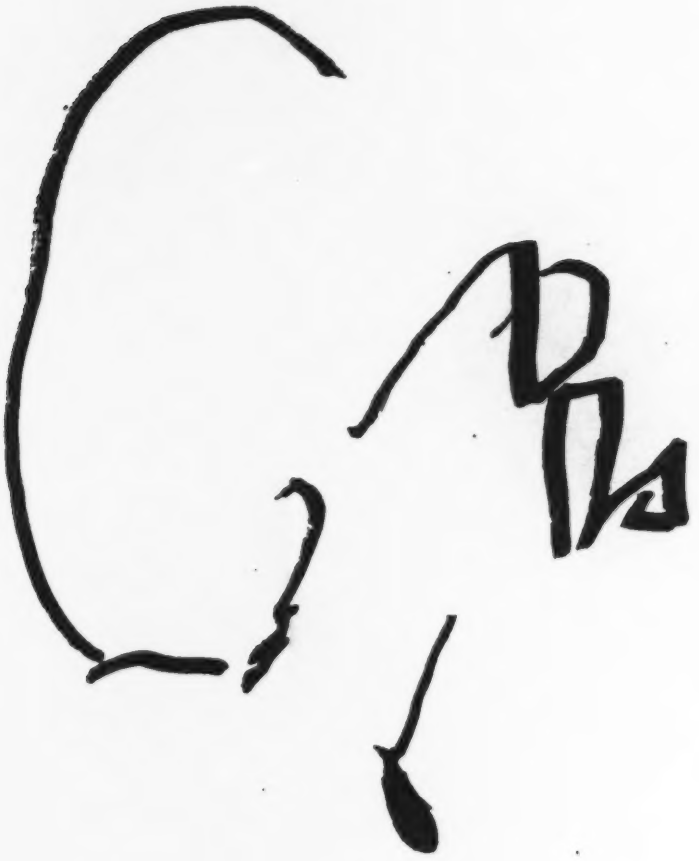


Figure 1. Courtney's writing: "CURS" for "window."

Figure 2. Courtney's writing: "This is a turkey."
"This is a turkey farm."

That's where we start our stories, isn't it. OK. Now you're going to write about your picture here.

(Writes.)

What word are you spelling there?

(Points to drawing.)

Window? OK. What does your sentence say?

(Whispers.) I'm not done.

Oh. OK.

Know what that one says?

What does it say?

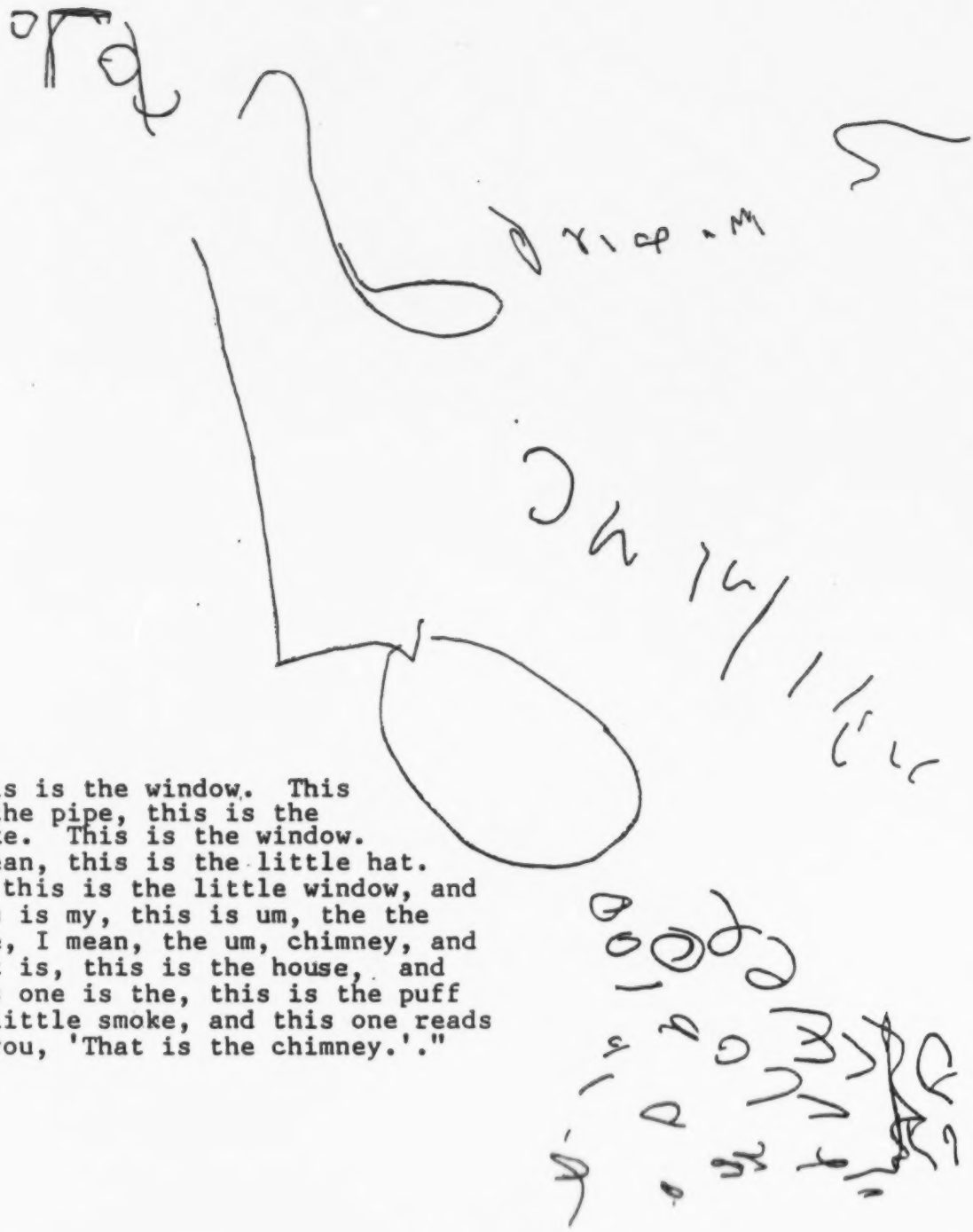
This-is-a-little-cap. (Points to drawing and reads using a reading voice.)

OK, I like the way you started over here and came across your paper. Let's turn our paper and start the second sentence now. (Turns paper for child.)

(Figure 3)

While Courtney was drawing, the child was self-directing and also somewhat teacher-directing. Lois responded to the drawing, the child's questions and directions in a supportive and confirming way. She praised her efforts and used questions for clarification of the drawing content.

The teacher became very directive, however, in her attempts for closure on the drawing activity. She interruped the child several times and pressed her to write. When Courtney finally decided that she was ready to write, the teacher told her which paper to use, where to start,



"This is the window. This is the pipe, this is the smoke. This is the window. I mean, this is the little hat. And this is the little window, and this is my, this is um, the the pipe, I mean, the um, chimney, and that is, this is the house, and this one is the, this is the puff of little smoke, and this one reads to you, 'That is the chimney.'."

Figure 3. Courtney's writing about her drawing.

and again, to write about her drawing. Lois' attention primarily on the directionality and spacing of the child's writing.

Courtney wrote quite willingly and seemed to enjoy the activity. She read her writing, showing how the graphic symbols corresponded with the figures in her picture. She revealed considerable knowledge about written language. She recognized the letter that starts her name. She understood how graphic symbols could represent the figures in her drawing. She understood the function of written language as communicating meanings: "and this one reads to you, 'That is the chimney.' " The teacher's response was only, "Well, that's a very nice little story."

Lois evidently did not recognize the knowledge that Courtney had employed during the writing event. Her language to the child consisted primarily of statements that provided Courtney with information and directions which told the child what to do and how to do it or questions that required "right" answers and clarification of information. Lois' teaching strategies often corrected and rejected the child when she deviated from the teacher's expectations. Lois struggled with the child for control of the writing process as she directed her attention toward skill oriented writing such as directionality and spacing. This teacher's

language and teaching strategies not only limited Courtney's personal learning during this writing event, but oftentimes were at crosspurposes with the child's efforts.

Final Observation: Teacher and Child Draw and Write

Lois made significant changes in her teaching language and strategies during the course of the inservice education program. Excerpts from the final videotaping provide such evidence.

Teacher (Lois) with Courtney

Lois began by drawing a picture, too. Courtney watched and talked with her teacher about the drawing. The child then drew a picture and talked and wrote about it (Figure 4).

Teacher	Child
	(Draws.)
I like that. What is your picture of?	
	A shark.
A shark? Oh, do you want to write a story about that? You want to use a second piece of paper or do you want to write on the top of the picture?	
	(Writes at top of picture with pencil.)
What are you going to write?	

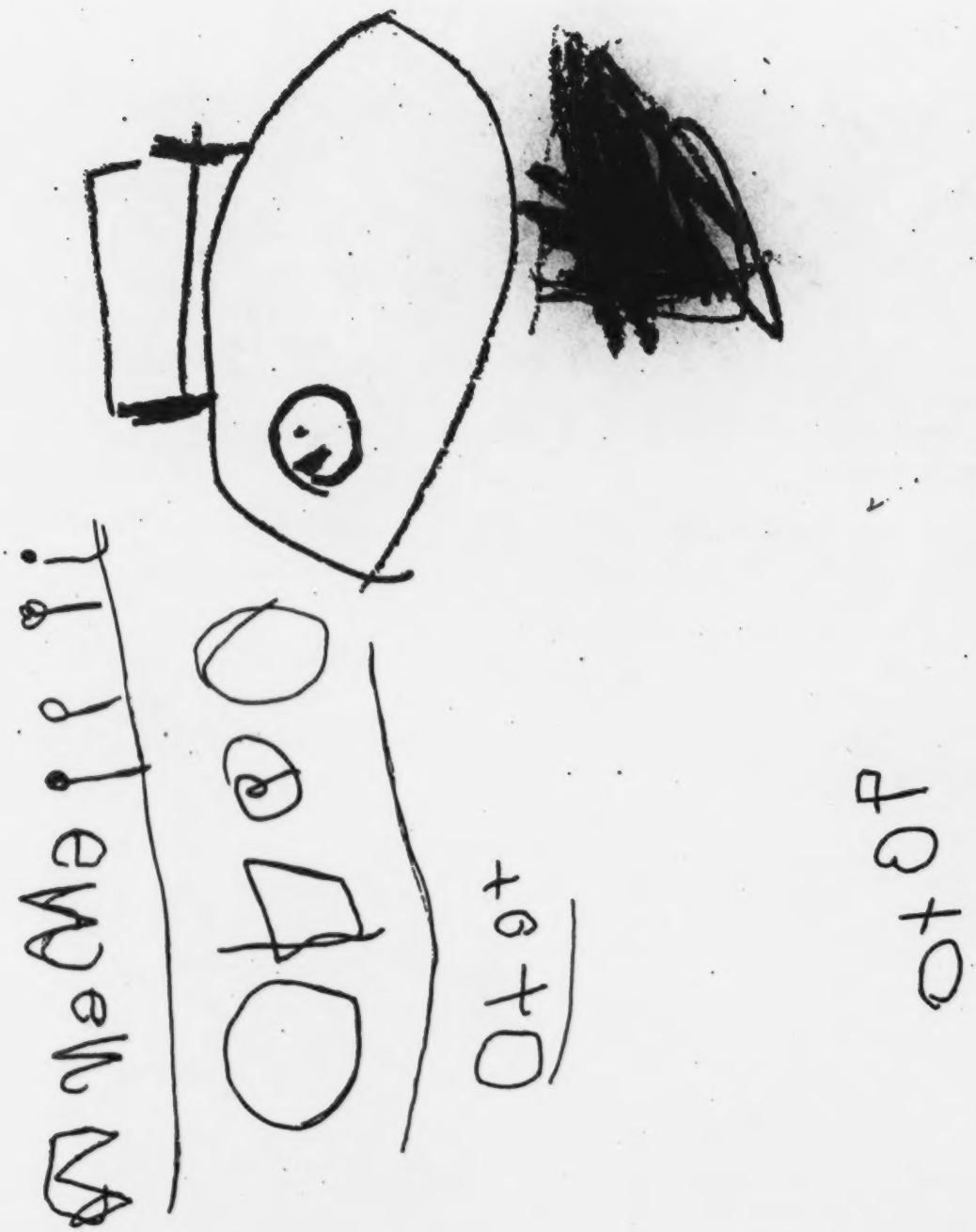


Figure 4. Courtney's drawing and writing: "The shark went to the river to see what her could find."

(Watches child write.) Can you read your story of what you've just written so far? What have you written so far?

The shark went to the river to see what her could find. (Points to her writing as she reads. Writes more.)

Oh, this sounds like a nice story! I wonder what he's going to find.

He couldn't find what he wanted.

He couldn't find what he wanted.

He wanted to find some fishes so he could have fish for supper.

Can you write that sentence down for me, too? "He wanted to find some fish for supper?" Ok. Write that down 'cause I'll want to read that.

(Reads as she writes.) The shark went to see what he could find.

Lois began by participating in the drawing and writing activity with Courtney, a strategy that affords an opportunity for a shared experience between teacher and child. As courtney became involved with her own task, Lois accepted and confirmed the child's efforts. She talked with her about the drawing and story content, attending primarily to the story content which functioned as an ongoing oral rehearsal for the child's writing. This combination of drawing, dialoguing about the picture-story content, writing, reading, and teacher-praise seemed to encourage the

continuation of the child's writing. Probably the most striking change in Lois' teaching strategies was her focus on the meaning of the child's written message rather than the mechanics of writing. Her language encouraged more risk-taking and personal initiative on the child's part, thereby moving closer towards enabling Courtney to maintain control of the writing process.

Educational Implications

Greater numbers of three- to five-year-old children are attending educational programs prior to entrance into public school kindergarten. Many of them are spending entire days with teachers who consider language arts activities an important component of the school program. When teachers are not familiar with the ways in which children naturally develop as writers and readers, they are likely to impose upon their young students skill oriented exercises in copying and tracing standard, adult print. Such activities not only are stressful for three-, four-, and five-year-old children, but do not afford them the opportunity to use their self-constructed knowledge about print in meaningful ways. It becomes the responsibility of prekindergarten school directors and teacher educators to implement inservice and preservice teacher training programs that

include a theoretical base from which teachers can understand the developmental processes of learning to write and read as well as the working knowledge to enable these natural learning processes of children.

In the present study, the teachers participated in three inservice training workshops. Teachers read and discussed professional journal articles pretaining to the development of natural literacy in prekindergarten children. They viewed a demonstration tape of a four-year-old child participating with the researcher in functional writing activities --- letter writing, list writing, check writing, sign writing and personal writing. The teachers also viewed three of their own videotapes and discussed with each other and the researcher those language and teaching strategies which enabled children to understand and participate freely in writing events. Attention was also brought to those behaviors that seemed to confuse or stifle the child's efforts.

TEACHING STRATEGIES DURING WRITTEN LANGUAGE EVENTS

ENABLING STRATEGIES	LIMITING STRATEGIES
Establish functional purpose for writing.	Have child write only "known" words.
Encourage risk-taking and child initiative.	Supply letters or spell for child.
Provide appropriate cues and suggestions.	Write for child and have child copy.
Model writing for the child, write with him/her.	Attend to letter formation, permanship.
Confirm, support, accept child's own efforts.	Attend to spacing.
Respond interactively to child.	Attend to directionality.
Give appropriate praise.	Attend to punctuation and capitals.
Have child read own writing while writing.	Correct, reject child's efforts.
Encourage oral rehearsal of intended writing.	Take control of child's writing process.
Read child's writing.	
Model reading of teacher's writing for child.	

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The program enabled the teachers to better understand and implement a meaning-centered model of literacy teaching and learning. When the teachers in this study attemped to direct and control the children's learning with interrogation questions, direction comments and insistence comments, the children responded by either following their teachers's model of writing or ignoring and resisting such teacher pressures. When teachers took control of the writing event, children responded by struggling for self-control.

On the other hand, when teachers respected each child's ability to determine content and process, when they invited children to write and accepted each child's way of writing, then children wrote prolifically and continued until the teacher or the researcher terminated the activity.

Educators also need to share with parents their knowledge and understandings of a meaning-centered model of literacy teaching/learning. Parents can then learn to appreciate and value their children's beginning writing strategies and written productions. Such understandings

will provide the necessary home support for children's natural growth as writers and readers.

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